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**SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE ROLE OF THE PROTAGONISTS IN
VIJAY TENDULKAR'S KAMALA**

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ABSTRACT

Vijay Tendulkar is one of the finest playwrights in Indian theatre. He is recognized as a pioneer of Modern Indian Drama, not just a regional playwright. His deep concern for society is evident in his plays. He makes the audience ponder about the social evils that exist in our society by exhibiting these problems in a straight-forward and unbiased manner. Instead of entertaining the audience, he mainly aims at forcing them to think. He has portrayed his vision of deterioration in contemporary society with an unshakeable pragmatism. His play *Kamala* is inspired by real incident where a fame-obsessed journalist Jaisingh Jadav buys a woman Kamala from flesh market. In this play, Kamala, Sarita – Jaisingh's wife and Kamalabai – maid suffer from Jaisingh's oppression.

KEYWORDS: Social problem, Kamala, humiliation, ego, flesh market

INTRODUCTION

Vijay Tendulkar, one of the most celebrated playwrights of India, is a movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist, novelist, social commentator and a critic primarily in Marathi. In the post-Independence Indian Theatre, he has brought a tremendous change in the world of theatre as he shocked the sensibility of the conservative audience by projecting the stark realities of life, relationship and existence. His plays are neither moral, nor immoral in tone but may rather be seen amoral and too realistic. Instead of resorting to romantic idealism and depicting false stories of victory, he wrote about the frustrated individuals fighting against hostile circumstances. He was a responsible writer who was determined to bring about significant changes in the society that dwelled on obsolete notions.

A social issue (also called a social problem, social illness or social conflict) refers to an issue that influences and is opposed by a considerable number

of individuals within a society. It is often the consequence of factors extending beyond an individual's control and local geographical environment.

This article deals with the life of protagonists Kamala and Sarita and the social problems in Vijay Tendulkar's play *Kamala*. *Kamala* is a realistic drama that includes Jaisingh Jadav, a name-and-fame obsessed who is majorly fixated on the recognition and popularity that has made him blind to humane values and humanity. Throughout the play *Kamala*, Tendulkar displays the typical sufferings of the Indian women caused by selfish, spiteful and hypocritical misogynists. He has shown women as the ultimate victims of male hegemony. He contemplates the status of women not being the mere objects of lust and carnal desires of men. The husband-wife relationship between Jaisingh and Sarita is usually seen prevailing in the cities like Mumbai, where employed men with lack of time for their family, have to content themselves by just

being social beings. Sarita and Kamala are two protagonists who are used as pawns used for Jaisingh's upgrade in social status and his shallow ego.

Jaisingh buys a woman Kamala at the auction held in flesh market to feed his ego and to gain popularity, recognition as well as promotion in his career. Sarita, dutiful wife of Jaisingh, takes care of every need of Jaisingh. The seed of doubts in her keen willingness to impress him comes when Jaisingh buys Kamala at an auction. Once Kamala asks her, "How much did he buy you for?" (Tendulkar, Kamala 34). This innocent and naïve question from Kamala made Sarita to ask herself about her status in Jaisingh's home. The truth of her being married to him as fancy slave in addition to the dowry, dawned on her. She has to be always available to fulfill his carnal needs, to serve as household servant and to display as well learned modern wife to Jaisingh and her opinions never mattered to him. He never treated her as his equal and kept her as a showoff to the society.

Whenever Sarita had difference of opinion with Jaisingh, he reminded her that he is the man of the house and whatever he said was final thus showing that he never cared about anyone's approval except his. He has double standards and he is a chameleon who changes his personality to suit the circumstances. When he is around people and in his workplace, his fake persona of pretence of doing good for the society takes over his real sadistic self. Jaisingh is a hypocrite and misogynist who can go to any lengths to satisfy his private, selfish and cruel motives. He shocks Sarita by delightfully narrating the purchase of Kamala in the flesh trade without even sparing the tiniest embarrassing details. This shows the uncivilized behavior and insensitivity of Jaisingh towards women.

He talks greatly about the morals and ethics yet he is nowhere near to following them as he is never worthy of such high principles. Once Jaisingh takes Kamala dressed in her clumsy attire, to the press conference. At the conference, she is dishonored and humiliated by the people including Jaisingh. Sarita is shocked beyond limits when she asks –

"So while they were asking her those terrible questions, and making fun of her— you just sat and watched, did you?" (Tendulkar Kamala30)

This shows how morally deficient and corrupt Jaisingh is and how little respect he has for women. Sarita realizes the extremely inhumane behavior and attitude of her husband. She also gets to know her position as his wife. The way Jaisingh exploited Kamala for his own gain made Sarita develop hatred towards her husband. He even forced Sarita to bed with him even though she was unwilling. After the realization hit her, Sarita has this state of mind:

"I am going to present a man who in the year 1982 still keeps a slave, right here in Delhi. Jaisingh Jadhav. I'm going to say: this man's a great advocate of freedom. And he brings home a slave and exploits her. He doesn't consider a slave a human being— just a useful object. One you can use and throw away. He gets people to call him a sworn enemy of tyranny. But he tyrannizes his own slave as much as he likes, and doesn't think anything of it—nothing at all. Listen to the story of how he bought the slave Kamala and made use of her. The other slave he got for free —not just free — the slave's father shelled out the money —a big sum. Ask him what he did with it" (Tendulkar Kamala 46).

Tendulkar in this play portrays character Kakasaheb contrast to Jaisingh who justifies Jaisingh's conduct. The men seem to have upper hand in the husband-wife relationship and the ideology of marriage in the society that favors their approval, actions, opinions and decisions. Sadly this convention is followed in the society and Kakasaheb defends Jaisingh too based on the same. He says when asked about Jaisingh's actions defending fragile manly ego. He asks Sarita to blindly accept the way the world works which cannot be changed.

"Look Sarita, Jaisingh is no different from other men. He is not unusual. You're wrong to think that he is a bad man. A man is always too proud of his achievements... That's why he's a man. And that's why

there's manhood in the world..." (Tendulkar Kamala 47)

He believes women are born in this world with their own baggage of difficulties which has to be faced by women alone.

Eventually in the end of the play, Jaisingh loses his job as journalist. The way he abused Kamala as a mere object at his disposal, the way he manipulated both Sarita and Kamala to act accordingly to his desires and wishes as puppets are all bad enough to get him incarcerated. Though Jaisingh stooped low in his life, Sarita was humane and understanding woman. She says

"But at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, Kakasaheb, when I will stop being a slave. I'll no longer be an object to be used and thrown away. I'll do what I wish, and no one will rule over me. That day has to come. And I'll pay whatever price I have to pay for it" (Tendulkar Kamala52).

She realizes her worth and starts valuing her life and

self. Both Kamala and Sarita are puppets in the hands of the puppeteer Jaisingh. This play also explains the current situation of the contemporary society. Women are told what to do, what to wear, how to be in every walk of their lives by the men and the male dominated society. The play ends with Jaisingh losing his profession as journalist, Kamala being sent away and Sarita determined to take control of her life.

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